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Daily Highlights

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* $2.1 billion pledged at United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities.

* Secretary-General decides to send election observers to Algeria.

* Secretary-General expresses deep concern at reports of massive displacement of civilians in Sri Lanka.

* General Assembly requests Secretary-General to ensure personnel recruited by Organization have command of at least one working language.

* Social Committee urges continuation of support to Palestinian people in their quest for self-determination.

* Economic Committee reviews scope of planned Assembly Special Session on Sustainable Development in 1997.

* Economic and Social Council recommends General Assembly approve World Action Programme for Youth to Year 2000.

* Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains calm and stable.

* Cuts in programmes of Food and Agriculture Organization are unavoidable because of reduced budget, FAO Director-General says.

* High-Level Environmental Conference adopts global action programme against pollution of marine environment.

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More than $2.1 billion in real or anticipated contributions have been pledged for development activities of the United Nations system. A total of 66 countries and observers announced pledges for the Organization's funds and programmes during the 1995 United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities, which concluded yesterday.

The United Nations Development Programme, UNDP received pledges of $950 million while the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF was pledged approximately $1 billion. Among other United Nations Funds and Programmes receiving pledges were: United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA which was

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pledged $97.6 million; $30 million for the United Nations Capital Development Fund; $13 million for the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM; and $6 million for the United Nations Volunteers Programme. The United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP received pledges of $1.9 million.

The Administrator of UNDP, James Gustave Speth, in a closing statement to the Conference, said to fulfil its mandate, UNDP would require $3.3 billion for its three-year programming period, beginning in 1997. It could not meet that target if the contributions for 1997 did not reach a minimum of $1 billion. The 1996 contributions, he said, were slightly below the 1995 level.

Several other heads of agencies expressed similar concern about diminishing levels of contributions and said implementation of their respective mandates required financial resources that were adequate and predictable.

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Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali has decided to send United Nations observers to Algeria to follow the final campaign and polling phases in that country. This follows a request from the Government of Algeria. United Nations representatives will observe the presidential elections scheduled for the 16th of November.

The Secretary-General has appointed Ambassador Hussein El-Kamel to head the United Nations observer mission which is to arrive in Algeria on Monday.

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The Secretary-General has expressed deep concern about the reports of the massive displacement of the civilian population in northern Sri Lanka.

In a statement, the spokesman for the Secretary-General said was evident that humanitarian assistance on a significant scale would be essential to minimize suffering. The Secretary-General called on all concerned to facilitate relief assistance to the affected population by humanitarian organizations. He had instructed the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to follow the situation closely and to maintain contact with the relevant humanitarian organizations and the Sri Lankan authorities.

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The General Assembly yesterday requested the Secretary-General to ensure that personnel recruited by the Organization would have command of at least one of the United Nations working languages.

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In a resolution adopted by a vote of 100 in favour to 35 against, with 29 abstentions, the Assembly stressed the need to ensure the availability of necessary resources to guarantee proper and timely translation of documents into the official and working languages. The Secretary-General was also requested to ensure that the use of another of the six official languages of the Secretariat was encouraged particularly in considering promotions and incremental steps.

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The General Assembly would urge all States and specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system to continue to support the Palestinian people in their quest for self-determination, under the terms of a draft resolution approved by the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural). The draft was approved by a recorded voted of 134 in favour to 2 against (United States and Israel), with 14 abstentions.

The representative of Israel said the draft intended to predetermine the outcome of the permanent status talks and thus contradicted the obligations undertaken by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the Declaration of Principles it had signed with Israel.

According to the observer of Palestine, however, approval of the resolution showed support of the United Nations for the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover their inalienable rights.

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The achievement of sustainable development should not be used to hinder development efforts of countries of the South, representatives told the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) yesterday. A North-South partnership was the best way to cope with environmental problems and Africa, in particular, should be given priority in the mobilization of resources. The Committee was reviewing the scope of the planned special session of the General Assembly on sustainable development.

The representative of the United States stressed the need for the proposed session to be forward-looking focussing on integrated implementation of the interrelated results of recent major United nations conferences covering the issue of sustainable development.

Most representatives noted that while the United Nations Environment Programme had been strengthened, only responsible, serious participation of Member States, coupled with their commitment to its financing, will enable it to fulfil its role in dealing with the problems.

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The Economic and Social Council has recommended that the General Assembly adopt a draft world programme of action for youth to the year 2000. The Council's decision came after three years of work on the elaboration of the draft programme.

Aimed at improving the situation of young people, the draft programme provides a policy framework and guidelines for national action and international support. Areas identified for action, are: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and decision-making.

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The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is reported to be calm and stable, according to a United Nations spokesman. UN Radio in the former Yugoslavia reports that the United Nations would be sending military observers to Bosnian Serb posts, to crucial villages and towns and other important locations throughout Bosnian Serb held territory. They would be supervising the situation on the ground and compliance with the cease fire agreement. According to the report, the situation had changed so much for the better in the last few months that United Nations officials no longer feared a repeat of the hostage taking incidents from earlier this year.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed grave concern over the human tragedy that followed the fall of the United Nations safe area of Srebrenica as well as the more recent reported incidents in the Banja Luka area.

In a statement, High Commissioner Jose Ayala Lasso said he was pursuing his efforts to ensure access of the human rights field staff to Serb-held areas in both regions. This access would allow human rights field officers to conduct direct investigations in order to clarify the fate of all the persons unaccounted for in both areas. The High Commissioner for Human Rights reiterated the urgent need for immediate and full access to these areas and instructed his Personal Representative in Zagreb to pursue his contacts with the Authorities in Pale in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to obtain immediate access to the areas.

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Cuts in the programmes of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) would be unavoidable in the face of a reduced budget passed by its governing Council. FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf however, pledged that the fight against hunger and malnutrition would move ahead unabated. He proposed to embark on judicious cuts and strategic streamlining which, he said, would constitute reforms that would leave FAO's work unimpaired.

The FAO Director-General said the $23 million reduction in the 1996-97 budget as compared to the current budget presented great challenges at a time when 80 million people suffered from chronic malnutrition in the developing world and demanded on FAO's services were increasing.

The Director-General's remarks came after the conclusion of FAO's governing Conference of Agriculture Ministers and senior officials from the Organizations membership, capping events marking FAO's 50th anniversary. For 1996-97, the Director-General had submitted a Programme of Work and Budget of almost $700 million saying that was the equivalent of the amount spent on dog and cat food for six days in nine developed countries.

The Conference passed a unanimous resolution to hold a World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996. The low-budget, high-impact Summit aims to build international consensus and solidarity for a united effort to ensure food for all and raise awareness of food and agriculture issues at the highest political levels.

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Representatives of over 100 governments have stressed the need for improved coordination and enhanced partnerships at the national, regional and international levels. In a Declaration adopted at a high-level conference in Washington, D.C. they called for sustained and effective action to deal with all land-based impacts upon marine environment.

The Declaration aims to protect and preserve the fragile ecosystem for present and future generations. The Conference, organized by the UN Environment Programme UNEP also formally adopted a Global Programme of Action, described by United States Vice-President Al Gore as the first programme "that will lead to more sustainable interaction between mankind and the world's oceans".

The UNEP Governing Council last may identified 12 specific pollutants for a speedy assessment regarding their chemistry and toxicology, their sources and deposition on a global scale, the benefits and risks relevant to their production and use, particularly on developing countries.

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